

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

FEATURE

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Walker 343-5634

THE SUNFISH FAMILY

In a swift stream, river backwater, calm lake, or farm pond confine, chances are one or more species of the sunfish family are inhabitants poised to snap at a variety of prey.

The sunfish family divides into three principal groups: (1) the black basses, (2) "true" sunfishes like bluegills and pumpkinseeds, and (3) the crappies. Collectively they are among the so-called "spiny-rayed" fish and are native only to North America--the most widely distributed and most numerous of any freshwater family of fishes in our country. A continuous backfin containing spines distinguishes them from other freshwater denizens such as the perch family--which is different even if many people do call bluegills "perch."

All reproduce in spring or early summer, some again later in the year, and all are nest-builders, some in "beds" which are colonies where nests almost meet each other. The male hovers over a saucer-shaped nest of fertilized eggs, acting as guardian, until soon after the eggs hatch, when the young must strike out--at low odds--for a life in the watery world. Many fish eat them--even their parents.

The aristocrats of the sunfishes are the two black basses, the largemouth and the smallmouth. The former, which gets bigger, prefers quiet, warmer backwaters of streams, lakes and ponds; the smallmouth inhabits cooler and swifter waters although it is also found in lakes and ponds.

True sunfishes, including bluegill, green sunfish, and pumpkinseed, prefer the same waters as the largemouth. The crappies, both white and black, are found in streams, lakes, and reservoirs. All of them are carnivores--they eat fellow fishes and other water life.

All sunfishes have a delightful but confusing array of nicknames. Depending on where you are, for example, a bluegill can be a "bream," a "brim," or a "perch." There are at least 50 different names for crappies, and even the largemouth is a "lineside."

State fishery agencies and the Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife have a number of management and research services for these fish, including hatcheries, stocking where this is indicated, and providing the right kind of forage fish, censusing the creel--and censusing anglers.

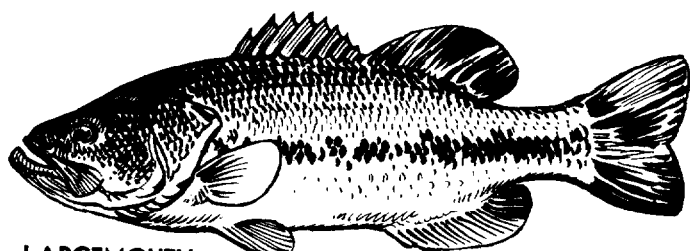
Sunfishes are a real pleasure to anyone who has ever wet a line: fly, spin, or baitcasters, plain cane-polers, and bent-pin youngsters. A wide variety of natural and artificial baits will work, from worms, grasshoppers, and minnows to tinsel and tin.

There are fish that grow larger, but largemouth is probably all-around popularity champion of the freshwater world. He's always ready for battle, one doesn't have to go far to find him, and he grows beyond the 10-pound size.

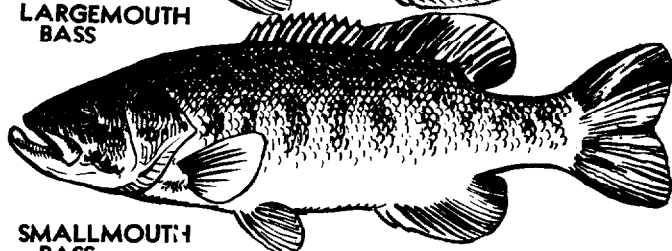
But which of us has not been introduced to the ancient, soothing sport of angling by holding out a cane pole with a corkline and grasshopper on the hook--seeking a saucy bluegill?

And this indicates the charm of fishing for any member of this family--techniques and tackle can vary from the simplest to the most sophisticated, but the reward for lifting a sunfish from the water is a fond memory for everyone, no matter equipment or skill.

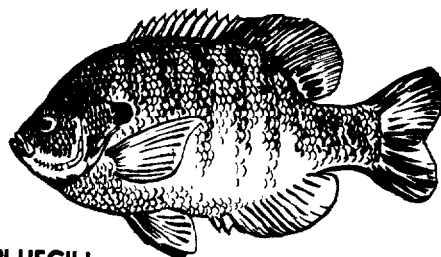
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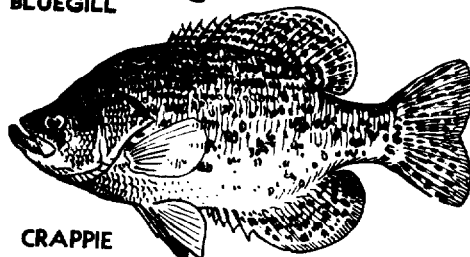
LARGEMOUTH
BASS



SMALLMOUTH
BASS



BLUEGILL



CRAPPIE